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Slideshow

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

Teaching Academic English to English Learners

Los Angeles, CA • April 2007

Topic: Teaching Literacy in English to K-5 English Learners

Practice: Develop Academic English

Highlights

- Academic English is taught throughout the day by regular education teachers and by specialists.
- Modeling of grammatically correct language and opportunity for student practice is critical.
- How key vocabulary is taught, including transition words that help students understand narrative and expository text.
- Several types of graphic organizers help students understand how texts are structured.
- The role of active learning in helping students master challenging concepts in context.

About the Site

Cahuenga Elementary School (K-5)
Los Angeles, CA

Demographics

64% Hispanic, 35% Asian

70% English Language Learners

81% Free or reduced-price lunch

Cahuenga provides bilingual instruction in Spanish-English and Korean-English in a four-track, year-round school. Distinctive features of the school include the following:

- Strong core reading program; also arts, music
- Regular formative assessment; database support
- Emphasis on standards; ongoing cross-grade teacher collaboration
- Teaching writing, with use of rubrics, starting in kindergarten
- Multiple forms of peer interaction
- Stable leadership; strong learning community

Full Transcript

Intro Slide: Teaching Academic English to English Learners, Cahuenga Elementary

This slideshow illustrates some of the practical instructional strategies used at Cahuenga Elementary to teach academic English. Graphic organizers of several types are used schoolwide. You can download an example of a Cahuenga story map in the sample materials section below.

Slide #1: Academic English

At Cahuenga Elementary School, the teachers build academic English into lessons throughout the school day. Teachers analyze state standards and test results to identify the language structures that students need to learn and actively share strategies for teaching academic English.

Slide #2: Planning Academic English

Teachers preview the essential vocabulary at the beginning of the lesson, provide guidance during discussions, and ensure that students get plenty of opportunities to use the academic language in context. In addition to relevant grammatical structures, verb forms, and uses of pronouns, teachers at Cahuenga have identified transition words, synonyms, and action words as important for students to master.

Slide #3: Academic Vocabulary

Teachers identified words essential for unlocking narrative and expository texts, such as words that signal comparison and contrasts, words for directions, and words that describe sequence. Those words require explicit teaching and lots of practice. Here one set of those words is posted in the classroom for easy reference.

Slide #4: Previewing

Here's an example of "previewing." In conversation, the word "sad" describes an emotion, but texts can use the word "sad" in a wide range of ways that students need to understand. In this example, the teacher elicited synonyms for "sad" to help students make the connection, and she wrote the Spanish word for "sad."

Slide #5: Action Words

Teachers help English learners with new words in context. Sometimes the best way to learn challenging words like "parallel" or "opposite" is to find an active learning approach. Here a fourth grade teacher is using square dancing as an active way to help students learn some challenging words. She starts with a teaching diagram and then gets students actively involved.

Slide #6: Learning New Moves

Now the class moves through the square dance steps, learning terms that will be useful in mathematics as well as other contexts. Teachers know that learning through physical response is especially important for English learners.

Slide #7: Specialized Content

The teacher also connects the square dance to other types of dances, taking advantage of an opportunity to teach vocabulary that students will encounter in social studies. Notice the potential for teaching mathematics, arts, and social studies at the same time through theme-based learning.

Slide #8: Thinking Maps

Teachers at Cahuenga frequently use "thinking maps" to help English learners grasp complex concepts. Thinking maps are graphic organizers that help students organize and document their thoughts.

Slide #9: Types of Maps

Teachers learned to use the maps through a workshop several years ago and now actively share uses during grade-level meetings. Some maps help students describe the characteristics associated with a concept, such as the bubble map above. Others might stimulate thinking about context or organizing major concepts and sub-concepts.

Slide #10: Map in Action

Here's a first grade student using a thinking map to plan a writing assignment. She's using a simple sequence of boxes to identify what she did first, next, and last. After this guided practice, students use the thinking map to organize their essays.

Slide #11: Independent Practice

After guided practice, students use the thinking map to organize their ideas and write their own essays. The thinking maps are tools that become scaffolding for students' work—tools that are portable and can be applied in many settings. Mastering academic English includes understanding how texts of all types are structured.

Slide #12: Another Type of Map

Here's another use of a thinking map created by older English learners to build out their understandings of the concept of competition. Imagine the rich language discussion that occurs among students—English learners and native speakers of English—as they talk about competitions.

Slide #13: Scheduling Instruction

Teachers at Cahuenga incorporate academic English throughout the day. During the reading block, a kindergarten teacher provides small group instruction on the text using grammatically correct phrases and appropriate punctuation.

Slide #14: English as a Second Language

Some English learners work with specialists each day to strengthen their English oral language proficiency while also building skills with reading and writing. Specialists coordinate the content they work on with what is happening in the classroom.

Slide #15: Independent Practice

Cahuenga students get lots of practice with academic English. Here a student is preparing a response to a text that had been read in small groups.

Slide #16: Peer-Assisted Instruction

Students also practice in pairs. Cahuenga teachers set up routines that help students work together to practice language—often responding to something they have read. Teachers frequently pair an English learner with a student who has mastered English skills.